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Spring — the perfect time to tie the knot



Taking their vows in church



Take your bride by bicycle



Crossing the bridge of love



The 'emperor' and his 'queen'



Nothing could stop marriage, even SARS!



A groom-to-be horsing around



By Jiang Xubo

It is in many ways little wonder that the number of sandstorms to hit the capital this year seems to have doubled – this is, after all, the year of double 'beginnings of spring'. This idea stems from the Chinese lunar and solar calendars. And the belief is that everything doubles in a double spring – including the number of lovers and weddings.

People have been falling in love since time began. And the practice of getting married has been around for thousands of years.

Napoleon Bonaparte conquered most of Europe but found it hard to capture a woman's heart. Edward VIII won the love of Wallis Simpson, but paid for it with his crown.

Some people even get addicted to marriage. Elizabeth Taylor was married eight times through the course of her colorful life.

And, of course, you never know what might happen. Prince Charles' wedding to Princess Diana was the stuff of fairy tales but it led to a broken hearts and a marriage breakdown.

But whatever happens, your wedding day is still likely to be the biggest event of your life. Happy couples are lucky and it is always interesting to find out how they fell in love and when they got married. You never know, it may also help you find the perfect match.

But first of all, you have to find your Mr. – or Miss – Right. Obviously it is more common to marry someone of the opposite sex. But – much to the horror of Christian zeal-

ots – same sex marriages are becoming more and more common across the world. Just recently the UK saw its best-known gay couple, Elton John and his lover David Furnish, tie the knot with a civil partnership – the legal equivalent of a marriage.

But finding "the one" is just the first step along the path to marriage. Next you will have to start organizing the ceremony – and of course, deciding what to wear. Try something new and be a unique bride. After all, you may never get the chance to be that eye-catching again!

And don't forget the wedding ceremony and honeymoon. A lot of couples are increasingly opting for wedding ceremonies and honeymoons with a difference.

And don't forget the banquet, an essential part of any wedding. After all you can't expect your guests to witness your wedding ceremonies and bless you on empty stomachs! Don't be conservative with your wedding banquet – a real feast is always welcomed.

Getting married can be very complicated. And many people believe that there's no such thing as a perfect man or woman. But perfect lovers do exist. That is why people find themselves partners. There is no doubt that couples are closer to completeness. Try your best to find the one for you and enjoy the game of love.

The May holiday is here and wedding bells are ringing – a perfect spring for hunting down a wedding!



Up close and personal ... with your pet

Got the hump with your human partner?

Well, if marriage to a man or woman does not flick your switch you can always get hitched to something else close to your heart. A quick search on the Internet will lead you to dozens of wacky sites offering to help you tie the knot with everything from your pet cat to your computer. (See more on Page 2)



Tying the knot in style

Finding the idea of a traditional wedding a turn-off? Want to spice up your wedding ceremony?

Then why not try something a little different.

Inside we tell you how you can tie the knot on a cruise ship in the Pacific, get hitched on top of Mount Everest or even say your vows as you bungee jump off a bridge. (See more on Page 4)

Bride tossing to egg breaking – wedding celebrations with a twist

Bride tossing, glass smashing and barefoot egg breaking – just some of the ways marriage is celebrated across the globe.

Inside we give you an insight into the wacky ways that everyone from the Tajiks to the Tanzanians celebrate tying the knot.

And with everything from pre-wedding hunger strikes to saucy scented baths, it's guaranteed to be a good read.

(See more on Page 5)

Hot honeymoons

So you've tied the knot, said your vows and sat through the speeches, now it's time for the ultimate in holidays – your honeymoon.

Inside we show how to make the most of your post-wedding bliss with adventures along the Amazon, diving in the Red Sea and ice-skating in the Antarctic.

(See more on Page 7)

By Tom Mackenzie / Jiang Xubo

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Underwater loving

IC Photos



Dragon boats and love birds



What would you marry?

By Tom / Zhang Nan
Ok, so boyfriend and girlfriend aside, who, or what, would you marry if you could? Don't worry, we just want to know what's close to your heart.

Cookie Wu is from Beijing and works for a Canadian company



If I could marry anything, I would marry an elephant. Elephants are cool and they are also pretty clever.

Oliver Schwarzenbach is from Switzerland and is holidaying in China.



I'd like to marry an eagle so that I could fly away with it.

Eason Gui is from Beijing and works for an advertising company.



If I could, I would marry a car. I like feeling in control, so it would be good to be in control of a car.

Charles Andre is from France and is studying Chinese in Beijing



I would marry my mobile phone because I can't live without it.

Emily Martin is from the UK and is on holiday in China.



I would marry my bicycle - the perfect companion for life in Beijing.

George Workman is from the UK and is working as an engineer in Dalian.

It's a toss up between



beer and bridges. Being an engineer, I love bridges. But I don't think I would get through life without beer. So, yes, it would have to be beer - and lots of it.



Have you made up your mind to marry this man or this woman? Wait a moment before you propose. See if you have an alternative.

In fact, you may have heard lots of complaints from married couples: "My husband is not loyal," "My wife is the most boring woman in the world." Step back, take another look: a more attractive option might be right around the corner.

Good reasons to marry a non human

1. You can marry as many as you wish, as long as they get on well with each other.
2. Don't worry about the sex of your spouse: a man and a male dog make a perfect match!
3. There will be no complicated relationship between you and your spouse's families. You don't have to pretend to like its brothers, sisters or cousins.
4. No children means no trouble.
5. You can still marry a human anytime you like.
6. You don't need to lie when your friends ask you to go out and stay overnight.
7. For women, your boss will be happy to see you are always available without family problems.
8. You only need to wash your own clothes.
9. You don't have to worry that your spouse will turn to others.
10. If you like, you can always tick 'Single' when giving your information.

Marrying pets:

"More about companionship than physical needs"

Marryyourpet.com



Dominique, one of the organizers of the web and her cat lover



By Wang Xiaoyuan

I am a Libra, and my cat is Leo, are we compatible? Well, I can say that my cat is beautiful, generous and loyal, and possibly the best friend I've ever had!

This is the Astrology service provided by www.marryyourpet.com, a website based in Holland, operating weddings for humans and their pets. If you want to marry your pet, first, you must propose to him or her. Then just click the link 'let's get married', then you will find three choices of marriage package; pay for one and fill in your and the pet's details to enter the wedding chapel, there will be a ceremony for you two; click 'I do'. In a couple of days, you will receive your Certificate of Marriage with the wedding gifts from the website.

Adrian is the Agony Aunt of the website, answering questions from webbies and pet owners. He said: "The church has many rules, but we don't think you can regulate love. To some people, their pet is more important than their fellow humans. We think it's time this relationship was given the importance it deserves."

The marriage between a human and a pet is more for companionship than physical or material needs. Matilda has been a pet and partners priest for longer than she can remember. She understands the passion between people and animals better than anyone else. To her, marriage with animals is not so different from humans', "...forget his facial hair. So what if he has an overabundance of legs, or must hibernate each winter? All that matters is that you adore him."

To marry your pet, you must be absolutely sure he or she is the one. Ask yourself these questions: Do you like the same music? Do you both want that little house in the country? If the answer is yes, then you may take the big step. The website has strongly pointed out that marriage is based on equality and mutual respect: by marrying your pet, he or she may be entitled to half your house and all your income; you are not allowed to mistreat the pet in any way; you cannot make him or her your servant; and you may not embarrass your pet at any time. Marriage is for life or until your contract expires. Last but not least, you are not allowed to take the life of your pet.

Margaret divorced recently. After much crying and talking with human friends and family, she decided to marry her five-year-old bearded dragon, Seth. "After I divorced, he always had an open

ear when I really needed to talk. He's been with me ever since he was just a wee lad. I said to myself I would do it for the one I love! His big eyes look up at me, I just couldn't wait to marry him. I love him so much, couldn't live my life without him. I love him!"

Some Rules:

If you wish to marry your pet, you must read these rules and comply with them at all times:

- If you want to consummate the marriage, we suggest you both share some cake. If your pet has a food allergy then a pat on the head will suffice.
- You cannot make him pick up your pants, put up with your nostril hair or use him as a general dogsbody - even if he is indeed a dog.
- Just because you have a friend for life

doesn't mean you can let yourself go. You may not go around in a dirty vest, scratching your nether regions. You may not get excessively fat. Just because you live with a dog doesn't mean you can behave like one. You may not wear unfashionable clothes or tell bad jokes. You may not embarrass your pet at any time.

- Marriage is for life* or until your contract expires.

*You are not allowed to take the life of your pet.

- It is the norm for your pet to assume your surname after marriage. If you or your pet is not happy with this, that's okay. You can call your pet whatever you like.

- If you don't play with your pet regularly, tolerate his nagging and allocate him equal TV time, you could be in infringement of your contract.

A smorgasbord of things to marry

ever, Johnsley has begun to find that the computer's response to her directions is becoming slower and slower. So she is now planning for divorce and looking for a new computer partner.

A Job

Why not marry your job? If job is as unsteady as a man, to marry it is perhaps the best way to keep it. Many women feel tied to a job when they have done it for a long time. The familiar atmosphere in an office, the reasonable wages, the regular working hours, the distance between the office and the apartment, everything seems to have made the job your life. How terribly, terribly sad.

A Goddess

If you are lucky, or charming enough, you may find the one sleeping beside you is not human but a goddess. In Chinese legends, there are many lucky men

married with goddesses. A goddess wife is unquestionably beautiful and omnipotent in housework. And her beauty will never change as time goes by. Your offspring will also inherit some power from the wife. There is only one problem: never let her family discover the marriage. And just try and sneak off to the boozier while your omnipresent harridan has the dinner on...

A Ghost

No matter who you are or where you are from, life's final destination is the tomb. So why bother to find a living thing? Ghosts are even better than gods: they also never get older, and there are no rules to stop your love. Remember the movie Ghost? Without a clumsy body, your ghost lover can reach around for anything you need when dancing or hugging, without separating for a single second.

The ten best things about a non human spouse

Why marry a dog?



For women:

Women have hundreds of reasons to prove that a dog is better than a man, here are just ten of them:

1. When you weave a sweater for a dog, it will take it happily.
2. Dog likes to accompany you walking or shopping.
3. Treat your dog right, it'll treat you right, too; treat your man right, he'll treat other woman right.
4. Dogs never mind if you earn more money than them.
5. Dogs never get drunk.
6. Dogs never read the paper on the toilet.
7. Dogs like to bring your slippers.
8. When you are driving, a dog just stays quiet, instead of laughing at your skills.
9. Dogs never ask how many dogs you had before.
10. When you have a headache, a dog won't demand you sleep with it.

For men:



1. Dogs eat anything you cook for it.
2. Dogs ask for no money to guard your home.
3. Dogs never stare in expensive shop windows.
4. Even if your dog falls in love with another dog, you won't lose it. You'll just have two dogs.
5. You can watch whatever you like on TV with a dog.
6. The later you arrive home, the warmer your dog welcomes you.
7. Whenever you want to leave, your dog follows, instead of sitting in front of the mirror for an hour.
8. Dogs never ask you: "Darling, do you remember what day it is today?"
9. The more messy your room is, the happier a dog will be.
10. A dog would love your beer belly.

Why houses are better than husbands



1. Houses are simple and honest. They never waste time proving how different they are from other houses.
2. There is a standard to measuring and evaluating a house. You know its quality before purchasing it.
3. When you open the door in the evening, the house will still look the way you left it in the morning.
4. You can decorate the house as you wish, it won't say a word even if you hang Hello Kitty all over the place.
5. A house is strong. When you fall in love with someone else, or lose your job, house is still there, instead of getting crazy, being jealous, scared or eloping.
6. If you need to, you can sell house.
7. A house always waits for you to come back.
8. As long as you sign your name, a house always belongs to you.
9. House prices boom occasionally.
10. Any house is almost twice as high as a man!

10 reasons why cigarettes are better than marital sex



1. You can smoke a cigarette any day during a month.
2. You can smoke in public.
3. You are always sure that you are the first one to open a packet of cigarettes.
4. You don't need to take a bath before or after smoking.
5. You can try any new brand of cigarette any time you like.
6. Smoking scenes can be shown on TV.
7. You can share a cigarette with a friend when there are no more left.
8. By smoking one cigarette, you can get several moments of satisfaction.
9. No one cares if you smoke in only one position.
10. Cigarettes never say "No" when you want to smoke; if you don't want to, it won't complain at all.



By Shelley Xie

We must admit, there are still millions of brides-to-be dreaming of their day in fairy white. But are there any other choices? Yes indeed. But have you got the guts to try them?

Corpse brides

Tim Burton and his character Emily in the romantic *Corpse Bride* gave birth to a series of rebellious styles such as the 'Satan' look, the skeleton costume and Gothic style. The dominant black color, coffin lining material, chain corset, tulle trim cuffs and fingerless gloves broaden the range of wedding gowns. A dark colored dress and veil is associated with funerals by most but more young chic couples are experimenting with black to prove that they are remarkable, outrageous and very cool! With a whole piece of black satin, or some details of chocolate beading and ribbons, the bride will not be lost in the crowd.

Mary Ball, a wedding photographer in Virginia, said that her friend, from the Dupont family, wore a black wedding dress and veil on her wedding day. "Actually it was very cool!"

Another photographer Mark Wahlster quickly noticed the little black ribbons that were running through his own daughter's wedding dress. "They added a nice detail and showed up very well in the photos," he said. If you're still hesitating, take inspiration from fashionista Sarah Jessica Parker, who looked unusual in her black wedding dress when she married Matthew Broderick.



You're getting married. It's going to be the biggest day of your life. When you take those vows and tie the proverbial knot all eyes are going to be on you. So, the question that is on the tip of every girl's tongue is, what are you going to wear?



Lanrelle Manvonmbi from Gabon is a student in Beijing.

I would wear something sexy. A sexy little wedding dress to wow the crowds.



Wang Doudou is from Beijing and works for a website.

I plan to hold a party where all the guests wear pajamas. Pajamas decorated with cartoon characters. Of course, I would be wearing them as well. I think it would be amusing.



Janet Wang from Guangxi works for a newspaper in Beijing.

I think I would wear a skimpy bikini at my wedding. I don't think there is anything more beautiful than a human being's body.



Troy Ellery is a project manager from Australia who has lived in Beijing for seven months.

I would wear something traditional but modern. I wouldn't wear a top hat and tails – I wouldn't want anything that fancy.



Beccie Wilson from the UK is visiting Beijing as part of a round-the-world tour.

I would want to wear a traditional dress but not white, maybe something in cream. It would have to be something classy.



Tom Fielding from the UK is also visiting Beijing as part of a round-the-world tour.

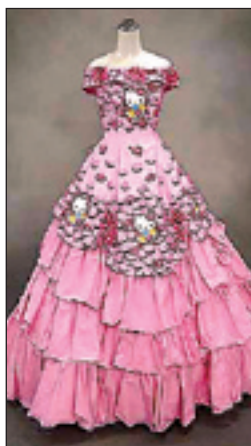
I've always fancied wearing a kilt at my wedding. I don't know why because I'm not Scottish, I just think it would look pretty cool.

By Tom Mackenzie and Zhang Nan



Brides in pants

For years, brides have been associated with gowns and dresses. Isn't it boring? So why not wear a pair of wedding pants? It's a little controversial for brides to be in pants, which means the silhouette of trousers more easily shows the elegant curve of the legs. But decorating with lace or fluff trimmings will achieve a gorgeous look.



Hello wedding kitty

Asia, and especially Japan, is wrapped up in the craze of *Hello Kitty*. So when a blonde Barbie wears a lace gown for her wedding, this is surely a *Hello Kitty*-inspired dress, making her look lovely and childlike. With a slightly strange interpretation of the western wedding, the Japanese put together a *Hello Kitty* wedding gown.



Body-paint bride

At a time when handiwork is highly esteemed, modern brides require a wedding dress as art instead of a piece of non-designed cloth. In China, several cities and places such as Taipei, Chengdu, Yinchuan, and Nanjing see avant-garde brides covered in body paint, either wearing it as a bridal dress when taking photos, or decorating on an exposed neck, back or arms to go with the clothes. Usually, fiancées will choose from an album of 'paintings', from the style of garments, animal or floral patterns, and diverse colors. Then, they can try the special dress on. If they wish to have their body completely painted for wedding photos they can wear skin-colored underwear and a paste bra. Although the price is attractive, more eastern brides prefer to use body paints as embellishment. The smooth and silk nude skin is wrapped with roses or lace-like lines, so the best-selling wedding dresses are those with room on the back and shoulders. Huang Yalan, a body-painter in Taiwan, said that because of the minimalist style of the wedding dress, many brides will make colorful drawings on their exposed body to complement their simple garment.



Queen of the flowers

The flowers are the best accompaniment for a wedding dress. They act as the brides' headwear and bouquet, and embellish every corner of the wedding reception. But did you ever wear a piece of floral dress to attend a wedding? Avouve, in Kiev, a girl tries on a lavender gown with a long train of flowers at the 49th floral exhibition in 2004.



Luminous star

The wedding night is always mysterious and romantic. When the lights are off, the bride can keep shining like a beautiful star to fuel the enthusiasm of everyone in attendance. Yumi Katsura, the world famous Japanese wedding designer, makes it possible with the design of luminous dresses and bouquets. "This dress is specially designed to increase everybody's enthusiasm," said Yumi at the Fashion Wedding Exhibition 2006 in Beijing. "When the bride shows up, nothing is different. But the sudden turning off of the lights leads to applause, screams and wows from the audience, creating a wonderful display and making the wedding unforgettable. That was the exact scene in my mind when I designed this." The new fabrics she used make the dress glow, as if the bride is lit by magic lanterns beneath her skin. "I hope some lucky brides can wear it, even though the price is not so affordable."



Bride of the universe

We live on earth, but nothing could be more special than to take a wedding beyond this planet. Brides need to really stretch their imaginations to achieve this look.



Marathons solidify marriage

By Chu Meng

People do strange things to show their love, but one Cortland woman ran in a marathon three and a half months after heart surgery to celebrate her second marriage. In September, Judy Mink was in the Cleveland Clinic 2004 undergoing double by-pass heart surgery.

On April 24, she and her groom, Police Chief Gary Mink, competed in the 110th annual Boston Marathon, and she beat him by nearly 30 minutes.

"It is hard to describe. It was awesome," the 46-year-old mother of three said of her experience. "It just brought tears to my eyes," she said, describing her emotions as she crossed the finish line and realized she could compete with world-class runners.

She ran the 26.2-mile course in four hours. The chief's time was four hours, 29 minutes. They

came in about the middle of the pack of 22,517 runners. "She is a natural long-distance runner. She just glides. I have to work at it," the 49-year-old chief said.

The couple has run in 10 marathons as they visited various parts of the country. "It will surely help the marriage," he noted, as they have something in common. It was the second marriage for both of them.

Chief Mink started running in 1991 in preparation for attending the FBI Academy in 1992. She began seven years ago. "In 2004, my doctor found classic heart-attack symptoms," she said. Mink was diagnosed with a congenital blockage of the heart and underwent surgery. "My doctor assured me I would run again," she said.

"People said it was crazy, running three months after surgery and against most advice to celebrate our marriage," her husband said.



Inviting a team of animals

By Shelley Xie

In a private zoo called Festival World of Animals in Manhattan, couples can organize a special wedding that includes animals. With a floral arch, an altar and banquet halls, the marriages are witnessed by several extraordinary guests – a parrot as the master of ceremonies, two penguins as the bridesmaid and the best man, black bears as turbaned coolies, the monkeys as suona horn players, peacocks as dancers and ostriches as guards. Combined with eastern traditions, Wu Juan, the creator of this amazing wedding form, and her suitor Brigitte trained the animals to get familiar with their roles.

The very first bride and groom to experience the novel ceremony were Morse and her fiancée. She is the owner of the zoo and also the would-be mother-in-law of Wu. On July 2, 2004, Morse's 47th birthday, the wedding cars stopped at the colorful arch of the zoo. Then, the parrot announced: "Wedding commence." "Music on." This was followed by the Wedding March, monkeys playing suona, and Wu leading two penguins with red bows on their heads to stand behind the bride and the groom.

After the vows, four bears carried the new couple on a red sedan. Then, they exchanged gifts, drank wine with their arms intertwined and bowed to the heavens and the earth, following Chinese traditions.

Within one year, there were seventy-nine ceremonies held at the zoo, not including 160 animal wedding ceremony shows. With the cost of US\$5,000 for each wedding and US\$350 per visitor, Wu not only earned enough wedding expenses but also met her true love.

A wedding ceremony is no more a big feast feeding hundreds of guests you know or don't know. Let's plan a unique one, keep on-lookers entertained, and attract the attention of the media!

Celebrate in the spotlight



Busy wedding on the No.320 bus

By Chu Meng

Everything began at one of the number 320 bus stations in Beijing six years ago. Now, six years has past and the station is still there. But the two strangers who waited for the same bus at the same station everyday have become a sweet bridal couple after marrying on the 320 bus.

No limousine is as roomy as Sun Ranran and Chen Hang's beautiful wedding bus. It was full of colorful blooms, ribbons, flowers and champagne. It was packed with relatives and friends who were honored to witness their most special day. It was the most eco-

nomical and efficient wedding vehicle ever.

"At first both of us just met each other at the same 320 bus station on our way home after work everyday," the bride Sun Ranran recalled sweetly. About forty days later they began to wait for each other on purpose. But they still did not talk and stood far away from each other on the bus. "Two months later when I changed to another job, which meant I would have to change my route to take different bus, I suddenly realized that I could never meet him again. Then I wrote a letter to Chen Hang, and left it at a newsstand at the station. Luckily, he received the letter and contacted me using the phone number in it," she said.



Web wedding on scientific research ship

By Chu Meng

Witnessed only by seagulls in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and 12,000 people on the Internet, a wedding was held recently via the Internet for a scientific research crewmember and his love.

The groom, Ren Jinmao, is a sailor working on the Great Ocean No.1, China's first scientific research ship to explore the ocean floor. The ship had to sail a total of 280 days across the Pacific,

the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean, and because the young man could not wait any longer he decided to hold the ceremony during the voyage.

But the impatient groom could not take his bride-to-be on the ship. The bride Xu Rongrong said, "as a matter of fact, we have known each other for more than 10 years. But we have spent much more time apart than together. I do administration work for the ship at headquarters."

On the wedding day, while Xu was at a hall at headquarters and Ren was on the deck, they exchanged rings and toasted each other via webcams. The groom cheered up, saying: "seagulls witnessed our wedding." And he knew 12,000 other people on the Internet had witnessed their wedding too.



Love messages

By Shelley Xie

They met via a cell phone text message, courted and fell in love over the telephone. They picked out their wedding rings over the phone before they had ever met in person. What could be more natural than Grete Irene Myrsllett, 35, and Frode Tangedahl Stroemsoe, 31 getting married in a phone booth?

In 2002, they met through SMS Flirt. Within a

month, they had run up 1,481 US dollars in cell phone bills. So to save money Stroemsoe waited outside a phone booth each night at 11pm to talk to his beloved.

One year later they decided to get married and Myrsllett finally flew to Haugesund, 200 miles west of Oslo to meet her fiancée. On September 13, 2003, they had the wedding ceremony in a telephone booth, sponsored by Telenor ASA, Norway's state-run telecom company. In addition, their wedding invitations were sent via SMS and over 100 guests turned up.



"I do" soaring to the sky

By Shelley Xie

Fourteen lovebirds from the United States, Britain and Germany said "I do" atop the Empire State Building on Valentine's Day this year. The ceremonies were held on the 80th floor Sky Lobby in the tallest skyscraper in New York City. At a height of 1,000 feet,

their vows could be heard easily by God and the heavens. After the ceremony, they enjoyed a champagne toast and a visit to the observatory on the 86th floor.

Before they can have a memorable high-rise wedding, fiancées must write to explain why they want to get married there before November of the previous year. The winners are chosen on the basis of originality and style.



Gender bender under Eiffel Tower

By Chu Meng

On July 9 last year, a young couple had their wedding under the Eiffel Tower. What was so unique was the groom wore a white dress and the bride wore a suit.



Out of this world wedding

By Chu Meng

Experience the Star Trek Wedding! People will conduct the ceremony dressed in

Starfleet uniforms to intergalactic wedding music.

Countless cool alien characters are also on hand for your maverick wedding.

What would be your perfect wedding ceremony?



Maria Blaeir, from Austria, is on holiday in China.

I would like to have a wedding ceremony on a beach. I think it would be great fun.



Alan Smith, from England, is a journalist who lives in China.

I would like to get married in a high tower or somewhere like the Great Wall. I think it would be fantastic.



Mailet Stanislas from France is on holiday in China.

I want to have my wedding ceremony on top of a high mountain. It would be cool to get married and look out at the world below.



Linda Stimson, from Canada, is on holiday in Beijing.

I would hold my wedding in Egypt by the pyramids. I think it would be incredibly romantic.



Writer David Currie from Canada has lived in Beijing for two years.

If I were going to get married again I would do it in an exotic location. Having a wedding in a place like Rajasthan in India would be pretty cool.



Shauna Bakken is from America and lives in Beijing.

I've been talking about this with my boyfriend for a while. I think getting married on a quiet beach in Mexico would be fantastic. I wouldn't care if many people weren't there just as long as we could take our vows.



Shauna's boyfriend Solo is from Nigeria.

I'd like to have the ceremony in a place that's out in the open, away from the crowds and peaceful.

By Tom Mackenzie and Zhang Nan

Bulang: Three weddings



The Bulang minority in Yunnan have three wedding ceremonies for each couple.

The first is after their engagement. The groom must live in his wife's house. After two to three years, the couple will hold a second wedding. The bride will live in her husband's household. The third ceremony is often held after a baby is born, and all the villagers will be invited to drink wine and eat a lusty feast.

Pumi: No looking back

The Pumi minority brides cannot enter the groom's family house on the wedding day. She can only stay overnight in a place nearby. The bride cannot look back on her way to the groom's family, demonstrating she is determined to live with her husband.

Tajik: Step on new towels

The Tajik couple must stay in bride's home on the wedding day. They will ride a horse back to the groom's house on the second morning. When they arrive, the bride's mother-in-law will put a towel on the entrance, the couple must step on it and enter the gate, which indicates they will start a new life.

Korea: Return wedding



Koreans have a special wedding ceremony called a 'return wedding'. If a couple are still in good health on their 60th marriage anniversary and have all their children alive, they will have a 'return wedding'.

Shanghai: Red shoes



In Shanghai, a bride must put on her brand-new embroidered red shoes once she leaves her parents' home. This indicates that the bride won't take anything from her parents and her future life is all down to her husband.

Yi: Hungry bride



The Yi minority girls refuse to eat anything ten days before marriage. The longer and more thoroughly the girl persists, the more respect she will receive.

Lahu: Shaved bald

The Lahu minority in Yunan has a unique custom: The bride is shaved bald from the wedding day. They believe that bald heads are more attractive and comfortable, and more healthy.

Hezhe: Pig head and tail

Hezhe grooms in the Northeast China must eat pig heads and the brides eat tails together, which means the bride is henceforth willing to follow her husband.

Based on the cultures and history, people of different nationalities, religions, ethnic groups and regions have different, and splendid, wedding customs. These various customs are particularly displayed on their wedding ceremonies, the most important part of matrimony.

Here we collect some of the most fascinating wedding customs from within China and around the world.

A traditional Chinese wedding



A traditional wedding ceremony in the heart of modern Beijing

CFP Photo

What is now seen as the traditional Chinese marriage became custom in the Warring States period (402-221 BC).

At dawn on the wedding day, after a bath in water infused with grapefruit, the bride puts on new clothes and wears red shoes, waiting for the 'good luck woman' to dress her hair in a married woman's style. Her head will be covered with a red silk veil with tassels or bead strings that hang from a phoenix crown. Then she waits for her future husband to escort her home, with married women telling her how to be a good wife.

The bridegroom gets capped and dressed in a long gown, red shoes and a red silk sash with a silk ball on his chest. The groom kneels at the ancestral altar as his father puts a cap decorated with cypress leaves on his head to declare his adulthood and his family responsibility.

Then the bridegroom sets out to receive his bride.

It is customary for the bridesmaid to give the bridegroom a difficult time before he is allowed to enter. After passing the tests and singing for his bride, the bridegroom is finally allowed to meet her.

The bride will be carried by the good luck woman to the sedan chair. A sister will shield her with a red parasol while another throws rice at the sedan chair, at the back of which hangs a sieve and a metallic mirror believed to protect the bride from evil. The bride has to cry to show that she does not want to leave her parents.

When the parading troop arrives at the bridegroom's place, firecrackers will be set off again. Before the sedan chair, a red mat is placed so that the bride will not touch bare earth. By the threshold a flaming stove and a saddle will be set up, and the bride is required to step over it, to avoid evil.

The wedding ceremony happens next. The bride and bridegroom are led to the family altar, where the couple *kotow* to Heaven and Earth, the family ancestors and their par-

ents. Then they bow to each other and are led to the bridal chamber.

Then there will be a grand feast for relatives and guests. The newlywed couple will be required to cross their arms to sip the wine and then exchange their cups to gulp it down.

After night falls, games begin. Usually all the young men participate except for the bride's married brothers-in-law. Those games help to break the ice because in ancient times the newlyweds never met each other before the wedding! Most of the games require the shy couple to act like wife and husband.

Other Customary Practices

Preparing the bridal bed: A good luck man, usually from a good family, will help to install the bridal bed before the wedding day.

A good luck woman will arrange the bridal bed and scatter candies, lotus seeds, peanuts, beans and fruit with auspicious meanings on the bed. On the night before the wedding, the bridegroom and a boy (unmarried) will sleep on the bed to bless the fertility of the couple.

Dowry: Usually the bride's dowry shall be sent to the bridegroom's family the day before the wedding. Sometimes the dowry will be brought by the bride's escorting troops on the wedding day to show off. Traditional dowry normally consists of items such as jewelry, embroidered beddings, kitchen utensils and furniture.

Bride's Return: On the second day after the wedding, the newlyweds return to visit the bride's parents. They will be hailed with a banquet and it is the bridegroom's turn to suffer the teasing of the bride's relatives and friends.

Today, traditional marriage customs are losing popularity due to their complexity. However, traditional marriage can still be seen in the countryside and cities from time to time, but simplified and with added modern elements.



Tanzania: hide-and-seek marriage

A tribe in the northeast Tanzania plays hide-and-seek on the wedding day.

On the day, the bride's parents will send the bride to the groom's village, but not directly to the groom's home. They hide the bride in the village and ask the groom to try to find the bride house by house. If the groom is lucky, he can find the bride, and then bring her to his house. If the groom cannot find the bride on the day, he cannot have the wedding and has to continue his search.

Some unlucky grooms take months to find their brides, and the wedding ceremony is repeatedly delayed. But the neighbors always enjoy the fun.

Japan: Throwing the groom



'Groom throwing' has gradually become a wedding custom in Japan. The more beautiful the bride is, the higher the groom will be thrown. In the past, in Japan's poor rural areas, attractive girls mostly married outside the village, so the village young became jealous of the grooms from other villages. Therefore, they tried to find a solution to get revenge on those who married their local beauties.

Later, 'groom throwing' became a popular wedding custom which indicated the bride's charm. If the groom doesn't suffer, he will make his maternal home feel shame. Now, as people have no such marriage ceremonies, and only one pair are selected as representatives annually, they are symbolically subjected to 'groom throwing'. After throwing the groom, people will burn New Year ornaments and hemp. If the flame is vigorous, it means the husband and wife will live happily. If it takes a long time to ignite, then it is regarded as being a bad sign.

(Stories by Chen Jianguo / Photos by sina.com)

Mexico: Guess birthday



Before the wedding of the Solaf clan in Mexico, the groom and bride must guess each other's birthdays. If either side guesses wrong, the head of the clan will declare the marriage invalid. This might seem tough, but in fact the pair exchange birthday information beforehand. Therefore, tourists in Mexico should be wary - asking the birthday of a Solaf could be taken as a proposal.

India:

Honeymoon before wedding



Indian honeymoons are different: the honeymoon is not after the marriage, but before. Young chaps can snatch a lover at night and go deep into the forest. There the pair live together for a month in a secret place secluded from the world. After one month, the newlyweds come back and visit their parents, for an official wedding ceremony to be held.

Indonesia:

Break an egg barefoot

On the Indonesian island of Java, an interesting marriage custom prevails. The groom will step on an egg barefoot, which is placed on a silver plate by the bride's family. In this way, the groom expresses his eternal love for the bride, even if he meets a cruel death. Afterwards, the bride will take water to wash his feet, which indicates her gratefulness and obedience.

Germany:

Throw and break dishes

Germans hold a party on the wedding eve, where the groom and bride are able to play tricks. Curiously, they are also encouraged to throw and break crockery with abandon, perhaps in order to cleanse any pent up kitchen-based rage from their systems.

Argentina:

Flower water bath

In Argentina, young men and women will take flower water baths before their engagement or marriage. They scatter flowers on the water's surface and use the flower petals to rub their bodies. The water is believed to be holy, and the flowers represent jubilation, so the flower water bath symbolizes contentment in the eyes of God.

Russia:

Throw glasses



After the blessing at a Russian wedding ceremony, people will throw their drink glasses to the ceiling and fragments of glass will fall symbolizing a happy marriage.

The decorations tied in front of their wedding vehicle shows whether the newlyweds expect a boy (bear) or a girl (doll).

Greece:

Cand(y) in glove

A new Greek bride will put some candy in her glove, which represents bringing sweetness into marital life. Greeks will also play a traditional round dance to entertain guests.

Switzerland:

Plant trees

The Swiss have a strong awareness about environmental protection. They will plant a pine tree at the wedding ceremony to represent good luck.

Arab: Onion-fried eggs

Arabian women have unusual tastes. Arab men eat onion-fried eggs before they marry to guarantee wedding night happiness.

Wedding banquets overseas

Cambodia

In Cambodia, the traditional food served up at the wedding banquet is banana dessert, a pyramid-shaped dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves.

Malay Peninsula

On the Malay Peninsula, there is a race of people called the Saman. They hold simple wedding banquets serving rice without wine or vegetables.

The wedding ceremony is a treated as an opportunity for friends to get together and socialize.

The rice is served on banana leaves and the guests eat it with their hands, talking and dancing into the night.

Italy

In Italy, the two chief witnesses at the wedding ceremony sit in the middle of the dining table. The new couple sits at their left and right sides. Other relatives sit according to their ages and positions in their family hierarchy.

The bride and bridegroom are asked to kiss, sing and cut the cake with one knife during the feast. The couple eats one piece of cake first, and then treats other guests to the rest.

Russia

At wedding banquets in Russia, guests shout "bitter, bitter". The newlywed husband and wife then stand up and kiss each other. Shortly afterwards another group will shout "bitter, bitter" and the couple will stand and kiss again.

The same thing will be repeated ten times. According to Russian tradition, wine is bitter and the new couple's kiss will make it sweet.

Make a perfect wedding banquet

Top wedding banquet:

A luxury hotel for your wedding banquet won't come cheap. But if you can splash a few extra thousand you should be guaranteed top quality service and first-rate food.

Wedding banquet and dance:

This is the post-wedding banquet popular in the West. There is usually a buffet, free flowing drinks and dancing after the meal.

Candle lit wedding banquet:

Opt for a candle lit banquet for the perfect romantic feel.

A wedding banquet for two:

A luxurious meal just for the newly-weds. Friends and family are kept firmly at bay so that the lucky couple can munch through their first post-wedding meal together in perfect romantic bliss.

Make your banquet memorable

Every couple wants a wedding banquet to remember. Here we give some tips on how to make your most important meal as memorable as possible.

- Put a message card in your wedding invitations and ask guests to jot down thoughts, feelings or words of wisdom...before they start drinking. If you feel inspired, read out some of the messages at the banquet.

- Put disposable cameras on the banquet tables so guests can snap photos of themselves and others.

- Set up a Big Brother-style video diary in the corner of the banquet hall and ask guests to record a message.

- Place name cards and small gifts for guests on the banquet tables.

- Put bottles of bubbles on the banquet tables so guests can have laugh if the speeches drone on too long.

Wedding banquet is a tradition for thousands of years and is also the hospitality by the new couples. Like the wedding parties loved by the Europeans, the wedding banquet is an inseparable part of a traditional

Chinese wedding.

Here are the most exciting and interesting wedding banquets and customs around China and the world. Also included are some tips to arrange a successful wedding banquet.

Fantastic wedding banquets



A typical wedding banquet in the countryside of China

CFP Photo



Poland: Kashubian wedding banquet

The wedding traditions of the Kashubian people living in the north of Poland have remained the same for hundreds of years. When the new couple finishes their religious ceremony, they choose a date and hold a traditional wedding banquet. Around 100 relatives and friends are invited for a feast.

The Kashubian wedding banquet usually starts with relatives and friends giving presents to the new couple. The newly weds will thank them with fruit and Champagne.

The first dish of the Kashubian wedding feast is chicken soup and the most important thing on the menu is the vodka. In Kashubian tradition, if there is no vodka on the table, the wedding will end in disaster.

Popular games played at traditional Polish wedding banquets include "tying clothes fasteners" and "looking for cakes".

The aim of "tying clothes fasteners" is to compete to see who put on clothes the most quickly. The participants have to take off their over clothes. When the host starts the game,

the participants start to put their clothes back on. They have to put on their clothes not only as quickly as possible but also in order.

The "looking for cakes" game involves picking a person among the guests, covering his eyes with a cloth and getting him to search for a cake hidden around the house with only his tongue. The game is meant to symbolize the new couple tasting the sweetness of their love.

During the wedding banquet the friends of the new couple pretend to be countrymen and countrywomen and perform the story of how the couple met.

At the end of the feast, the cook serves the last host dish of the meal – the famous Polish borsch and tripe soup. The guests drink the soup and dance, waiting for the new day to dawn.

When night becomes day, guests gather together and sing the last song of the wedding banquet. This is the first morning for the couple as husband and wife and represents the newlyweds saying goodbye to their past and receiving their future.

Hui: Bantering bridegroom's father

In Gansu province, the Hui minority has a wacky tradition of teasing the bridegroom's father on the big night.

Hui traditions advocate Friday as the most auspicious day to get married. And people are banned from setting off fireworks on wedding days.

The Hui have wedding banquets that last for two days. On the first day, male guests are treated to a "male banquet"; and female guests, relatives, and friends who come to from far away to celebrate are fed on the second day with male and female guests sitting separately. The Hui call this the "big banquet".

The dishes for the banquet are sumptuous and during the feast, the guests will rib the bridegroom's father.

Sometimes male guests will gather together and

ask the father to sit on a chair, which is put on a table. Then they will cover the father's face in white and red powder. If there is no powder at hand, guests will paint the father's face with coal and red paint.

It is also not unusual for guests to tie red threads adorned with Chinese dates over the father's ears and to put a straw hat covered in flowers on his head. If the father is lucky he may even get a necklace made of carrot.

Throughout the whole nutty affair, the bridegroom's father must stay calm and keep a smile on his face - after all, it's all in the name of fun.

According to tradition, if the bridegroom's father co-operates with the pranksters, the guests will tone down their jokes. If he reacts the pranks will just keep coming.



Kemu: Scrambled pork

The Kemu people has a tradition of scrambling pork for their wedding banquets.

The Kemu people, an ethnic minority group not officially identified yet, has a population of around 2,000 and live in Jinghong and Jinping county in Yunnan province and in Lila county which is on the border of Laos.

In Kemu tradition, wedding feasts are held by the bridegroom's family in the bride's family home. The bridegroom and his friends take pigs, wine and vegetables to the bride's home early on the morning of the wedding. Female pigs are bought to the home in the belief that their presence will help the bride have more children. When the bridegroom and his friends arrive at the bride's home, the bride's fam-

ily will simply stand back and watch as he prepares the banquet.

The bridegroom and his friends will light a fire and boil water.

He will then splash boiling water on the pig to scald its skin before finally killing it. The bride's family members will then start scrambling the pork alongside the bridegroom and his buddies. Villagers will gather around and cheer the two sides on, stopping occasionally to dip their hands in the pigs' blood to smear it on people's faces.

If the bridegroom's side fails in their bid to scramble the pork, they have to pay the bride's family for the cost of the pig. The two families then cook the pork and prepare for the banquet.



A fishing people's tradition

In Shatian area in Zhujiang, Guangdong province, the fishing community there has a special wedding feast tradition.

In the bridegroom's family, the wedding lasts for three days. On the first day, relatives and friends come to visit. They help the bridegroom's family cook and offer sacrifices to the ancestors. In the evening of the first day, people start their first dinner, called "maichuanfan" (dinner for burying the boats).

On the evening of the second day, the wedding banquet starts. When the day turns to night, the tradition of "zuogaotang" (also called "zuoye") begins in the bridegroom's family home.

The ancestors' memorial tablets are displayed at the front of the house and straw mats are placed on the floor. The relatives sit on two sides of the house with the bridegroom in the

middle with two his two best men sitting at his left and right.

Three ceremonies are held during "zuogaotang."

First, the bridegroom's brother gives a new straw mat to the bridegroom. The bridegroom will put the mat on the bed. The mat is meant to symbolize a strong relationship between the two men. The relatives then give moneyboxes to the bridegroom. Finally, the host of the wedding will do up the bridegroom's hair.

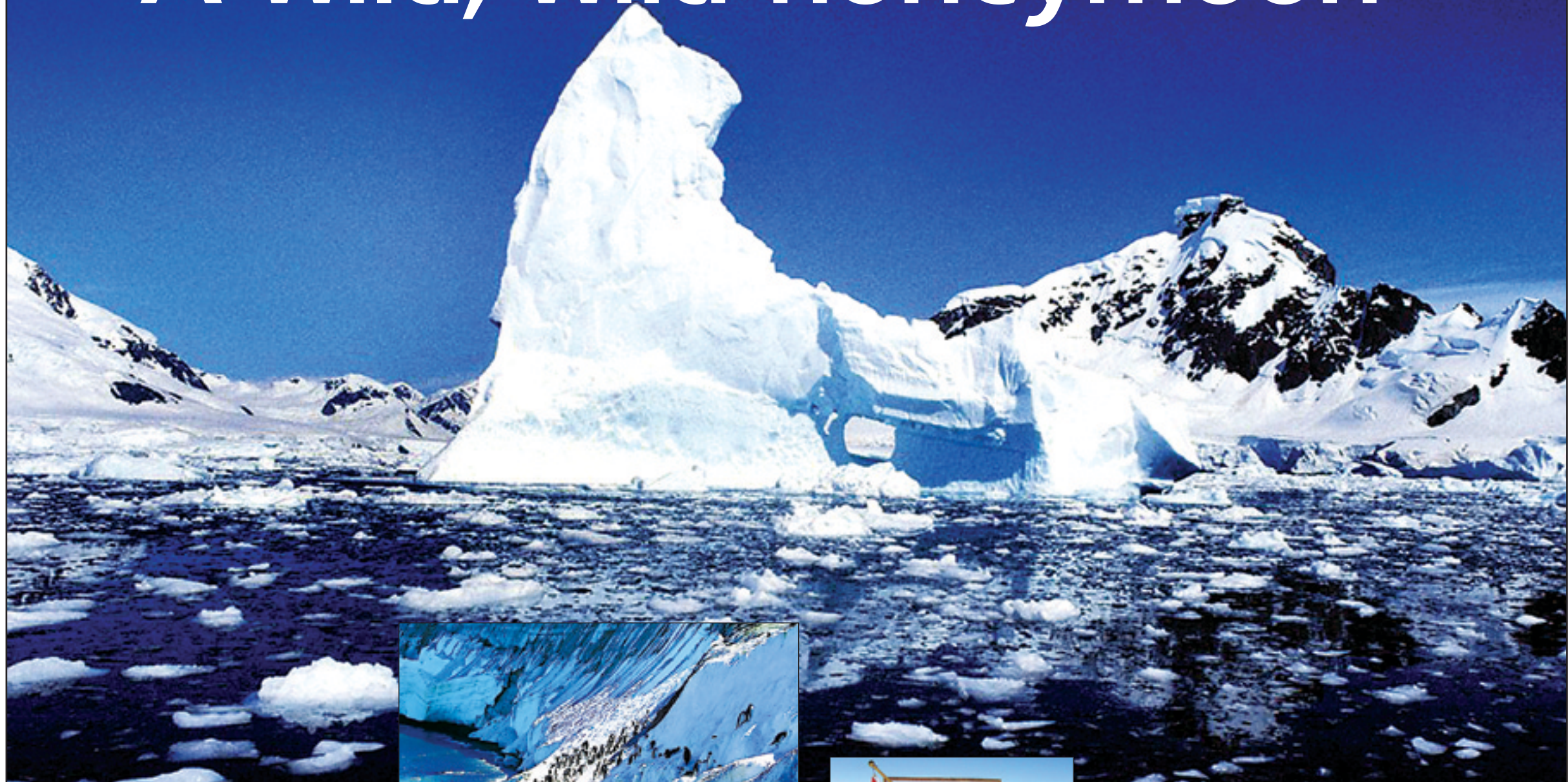
While the wedding host is doing up the bridegroom's hair, the groom's family will cook a pot of "tangyuan" (dumplings made of glutinous rice flour served in soup). The dumplings symbolize a happy marriage.

Once the three ceremonies have been completed, family and friends start to sing traditional songs.

(Stories by Lucky Zhang / Photos by sina.com)

Still thinking of a honeymoon in Paris, Hawaii, Rome, or Tokyo? Been there, done that, bought the t-shirt, you're boring me already. Your honeymoon is the most romantic and memorable time of your life. Do something unusual! Beijing Today picks the coolest and hottest places for honeymooning.

A wild, wild honeymoon



A British couple getting married in Antarctica

Dream honeymoon destinations

By Tom / Zhang Nan

So you've tied the knot and left the drunken crowds of family and friends far behind. But what would make your perfect honeymoon destination?

Ding Hong is from Jiangsu Province and is a car salesman.

I would go hunting in Africa. My wife might not be too chuffed but the wild grassland would get me excited.

Xie Xiaoxue is from Beijing and works for a newspaper.

I'd go to the moon. My husband and I would wear kinky space suits and we would spend our time checking out the moon and keeping our eyes peeled for aliens.

Chen Zhi is from Shanxi Province and works for a website.

I would go to a tropical island like Hawaii in America, Phuket Island in Thailand and Pangkor Laut in Malaysia. You can't beat a bit of sun on your honeymoon.

Wang Li is Chinese and lives in Beijing.

I would go to the most romantic place on earth - Paris. I don't think anywhere could beat that.

Alistair Law is from England and lives in Shanghai.

If I ever find the love of my life and get married, I will whisk her off to the Antarctic for a chilled honeymoon. I think it would be really funky.

Kate Atkinson is from the United States and works for a travel firm in Beijing.

I would go hiking in the Himalayas. It would be great to camp out under the stars surrounded by mountains.

A honeymoon on ice

By Chen Shasha

Keywords: penguin, glacier, aurora, cold, challenge,

Could you imagine honeymooning in Antarctica? New couples can share the challenges of distance and cold to visit the ice-bound continent, hoping their love will last forever like the eternal ice mountains.

In Antarctica, the landscape is reduced to its barest elements: ice, rock, water and sky. But within those elements are surprising variations, both subtle and dramatic. Ice appears in endless shapes, forms and colors -

from floes and bergs to sheets and shelves. Visitors to Antarctica must endure the cold weather, but those who can are rewarded with amazing scenery and tremendous wildlife.

In Antarctic, beauty often appears magnificently at night, in the form of aurora. It looks like a colored ribbon, or a ball of flame. The aurora is the result of the sun's rays on the unusual atmosphere. However, ancient people believe it is a warrior of the sky, and myths are founded around it.

Actually, natural scenery is not the only romantic scene in Antarctic. In

2004, the first Orthodox Church in Antarctica was built at Russian polar station Bellingsgauzen. When coming to Antarctica from Tierra del Fuego, the Orthodox Church will be the first spot visitors see. The church, which was built of cedar and larch, the most cold and wind-resistant wood in the Altai territory (South Siberia), can seat up to 30 believers. Ever imagined a wedding ceremony at the pole? Now, Antarctica cannot only give you a wonderful honeymoon, but also a memorable wedding.

However, going to Antarctica is a

way to test how deep a new couple love each other. No cinema, no markets, no television: life in Antarctica seems dull for modern people. Couples there can enjoy a totally undisturbed world. Localized blizzards and life-threatening temperatures are an ever-present danger. However, passing through life and death can also be regarded as a test of true love.

How to go: If you are on a budget, take vessel from Hong Kong to the South Shetland islands in Antarctic. 10 days on the ship will cost around 7,000 yuan.

Honeymooning with Mother Nature

By Chen Shasha

Keywords: rain forest, wildlife, tree hotel

What is hotter, the new couple's passion or the weather? A wedding and honeymoon in South America with Mother Nature can be a fantastic experience.

Last year, the White Stripes frontman Jack White took off for Brazil and got hitched in a quick marriage to British model Karen Elson. In the ceremony, the two were floating in canoe on the confluence of three rivers - the Rio Negro, the Solimones and the Amazon - in the Amazon Basin in the city of Manaus.

Once referred to as 'the last destination on earth' by National Geographic, the Amazon is a leisure paradise away from noisy modern life. As early as 1992, Bill Gates went there to enjoy life without any business work. In the Amazon area, the greatest spectacle offered by nature is its exuberant flora owing to the strong connection between the forest and the river. Besides that, over 2,000 species of fish makes the Amazon a fantastic world of wildlife.

When cruising down the Amazon River, people immerse themselves in the sensations of the rainforest. However, swimming in the river is dan-



Sailing on Amazon river



The Aria Amazon Towers

gerous for it's the home of millions of piranha, which can eat a man in only few minutes. Fishing here is a challenge. If you get hungry, some kinds of soil in the rainforest can be eaten, and the sap from the trees makes a good drink.

When tired, the Aria Amazon Towers will offer a complete infrastructure to you're your honeymoon unforgettable. The Towers is the only hotel

complex at tree top level in the Amazon Rainforest. Outside of the Amazon Towers are a lot of monkeys welcoming tourists, while inside are hammocks fastened to the trees.

How to go: People cannot go to the Amazon direct from Beijing. Take a flight to Frankfurt in Germany and then transfer to Sao Paulo in Brazil, the whole trip takes more than 30 hours.

Red carpet honeymoon

By Chen Shasha

Keywords: film star, disaster film, DV for tourists

Want to film your own love story? Hope to experience a movie disaster with the one you love? Go to Hengdian world studio in Zhejiang province and your film star dream will come true.

Hengdian World is now the largest film studio in China. At least 40 Chinese and International films are made there, including *Hero* by Zhang Yimou and the *Promise* by Chen Kaige. Touring Hengdian, people will have

many opportunities to meet global film stars.

Recently, a new service was offered to help those film fans who want to have their own stories on the screen. Weddings and honeymoons can now be adapted into a filmic love story. Tourists can choose whomever they want to be, from an emperor to themselves. At least 100 costumes are offered to help you enjoy a fantastic film journey. Film actors will also join if required.

In Hengdian world, modern technology is used to make disaster a



An ancient Chinese Titanic?

kind of game. In some places, a bolt of chain lightning comes down in a very crooked line, and then goes with the flood. People are rushing and crying, but nobody is in-

jured. Although many films have such scenes, people in China can hardly go through it without going to Hengdian. Expecting a challenging romance? Hengdian may be a good place to go.

How to go: Travel to Shanghai and take No. 809 railway to Yiwu in Zhejiang province, then transfer at the Jiangdong bus station. The bus to Hengdian World takes only 30 minutes. Price of Hengdian tour ticket is from 20 to 340 yuan per person, according to how many attractions are included.



A typical wedding photo in 1910

The 1910s

From the beginning of last century, sections of Chinese society, in particular people with an education, started to pursue freedom in marriage, ignoring the pressures of sticking to tradition.

Lin Yutang, who enjoyed worldwide fame as author of *My Country and My People*, married Liao Cuifeng in 1919.

And it was Liao's decision as a young girl that led to the couple being happily married for over 50 years.

The young couple spotted each other for the first time when Lin was invited to have dinner with Liao's family, a rich family.

The couple met with opposition the girl's mother when they planned to get engaged.

"He is the priest's son. They are poor," the mother complained.

"It's nothing." The girl said with determination. The wedding date was set and in 1919 the couple wed.

The young husband gave a promise to his new wife in his own way shortly after the wedding. He burned their marriage certificate telling his wife, "This stuff is useful only when you want a divorce."

(By Jiang Xubo)



Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe

The 1930s

From the early 1930s, China began to adopt new wedding styles, similar to those in Europe. Lots of young Chinese couples chose to arrange the weddings themselves instead of letting their parents do it. Although some continued to marry partners selected by his or her parents, the wedding ceremonies became less traditional, more simple and cheaper.

The love story of Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe, one of the most famous literary couples in China, is typical of the time. Shen Congwen is one of modern China's great writers. He is also one of the finest Chinese prose composers and literary critics. He met Zhang Zhaohe in 1928 when he was a teacher in Zhaohe's college. He fell in love with the beautiful Zhaohe on first sight.

But with many men pursuing her, Zhaohe was not immediately attracted to Shen so he began to write love letters to her. Despite writing dozens of letters, Zhaohe gave Shen a 'silent refusal'. After receiving love letters from Shen for four years, Zhaohe finally decided to marry him.

Their wedding was held on September 9 in 1933. It was a very simple wedding in a park without any special rites and no wedding ceremony. The young couple did not even wear wedding clothes. Shen wore a common blue short gown and Zhaohe dressed in a traditional cheongsam.

(By Han Manman)

Wedding ceremonies vary, but love never changes. We look back on one hundred years of love from the beginning of last century until the present day, with ten couples from different eras telling us their stories.

A century long marriage



Bingxin (front left three) and Wu Wenzao (front left two) at their wedding ceremony.

The 1920s

In the 1920s, educated Chinese people turned marriage into what it should be - love and appreciation between two people.

Bingxin, one of China's best-known 20th century female writers got married in Beijing in 1929 to Wu Wenzao, five years after the couple first met aboard a liner as they traveled to the US to study.

"Our wedding was held in the university's campus on Saturday. It was quite simple. Just our colleagues and classmates were there. The cakes, coffees and tea desserts to treat our guests cost me just 34 yuan (US\$ 4)," said Bingxin in an article written in memory of her husband.

There was no ceremony. The couple found a room for guests in a temple in Beijing. Apart from a wooden bed and a three-legged table supported with piles of bricks, there was no other furniture in the room. The bride and the groom, both PhDs who had returned from the US, spent their wedding night right in the small room in mountains, with the moon and stars over their heads in the sky.

(By Jiang Xubo)

The 1940s

White wedding dresses started to become popular in China's cities in the 1940s. Many couples preferred western-style weddings to traditional Chinese weddings. They preferred hiring cars instead of riding on horseback and preferred wearing white wedding dresses instead of red. Before, the wedding photographer would take a picture of the two families.

In the big cities there were a growing number of photographers experienced in taking wedding photos. Although color film did not exist, photographers would paint colors on black-and-white film, as was the trend in those days.

Zhou Xiaqian married her husband Si Huchun in January 12, 1944 in Guangxi. At that time, both Zhou and Si served in the army. Zhou said it was very popular for the bridegroom to welcome the bride through a sedan chair and has 20-table feast in the wedding.

(By Wei Ying)



A typical wedding photo in 1950s.

The 1950s

Wedding ceremonies in cities became much plainer and simpler after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. But in the countryside some traditional practices remained, with matchmakers and sedan chairs playing key roles in marriage ceremonies.

Zhou Xiaqian and Si Huchun
Photo provided by Zhou Xiaqian

Li Qunying and Jiang Shiwu's marriage was a typical one of the time.

"I hardly knew him before his family sent a matchmaker to my family. I accepted the proposal, though our lunar birth dates did not match very well," said Li Qunying, who is now 72-years-old.

Her fiancé, an ex-signalman during the Korean War, could not afford a generous marriage gift, like the traditional hunk of pork, fish, rice noodles and lotus root.

"I asked for nothing, but I insisted on being carried in

a large sedan chair by eight people on the wedding day," said Li.

To the sound of a band of Chinese gongs and trumpets, the sedan chair, which represents honor and glory, carried Li to her new home dozens of kilometers away.

The next morning, guests gathered in the wedding hall and cast chopsticks to the ground, watching as the bride picked them up.

"It was said the number of the sticks you picked up could tell how many children you would have in your life. I picked up a huge bunch," Li said with laughter.

(By Jiang Xubo)

In 1960s

Romantic ideas about getting married drained away and weddings could not help but become political in the 1960s. Li Meizhen and Li Tianjun got married in 1967, a year after the start of the Great Culture Revolution.

"I hardly read any of Mao's books. But I got ten volumes of them at my wedding," said Li Tianjue with a laugh.

Li Tianjue and Li Meizhen finally got married in 1967, years after they met each other for the first time when they went to the same teaching school at the beginning of 1960s, though for years they had known each other just by name.



A typical wedding photo in 1960s

Their wedding was held in only two hours that summer at the groom's room, which had been decorated with quotations from Chairman Mao. Dozens of friends and neighbors witnessed the short ceremony.

Though Tianjue did not find much interest in Mao's works, he did find an interest in traditional Chinese painting. At the same time, he also danced the Waltz at dusk with his wife in a park near their home - his wife's greatest joy and something they share together.

(By Jiang Xubo)

Feng Hui and Yu Guoying
Photo provided by Yu Guoying

The 1970s

China introduced the Reform and Opening policy in 1978, after ten traumatic years under the Great Cultural Revolution. The Chinese people embarked on a road to modernize China and their marriage style was influenced by the subsequent changes. Young couples in the 1970s began to pursue weddings with a difference, adding their own character and style to the celebrations.

"My friends introduced me to my wife," said Yu Guoying, a journalist. Yu Guoying and Feng Hui got married on September 22 in 1979, 56 days after they first met.

"My wife chose this day because 'nine' and 'two' are considered lucky numbers in China. 'Nine' means 'for long' and 'two' means 'in pairs'," Yu said, adding, "She wanted to get married on that day in the hope that our marriage would be long and happy."

In those days couples could only buy a double bed if they had a marriage certificate. There were no more than five furniture shops in Beijing so there was a huge demand for double beds.

Yu said the couple received gifts from colleagues and friends including bed covers, reading lamps and tea sets. "Although the gifts were not very expensive they were practical. During the Great Cultural Revolution marriage gifts usually just consisted of lead and plaster models and political books," said Yu.

The wedding was quite simple. Without taking any rites, they invited their parents and some good friends over for dinner.

(By Han Manman)



A typical wedding photo in 1990s

The 1990s

In the 90s, when China's economy started to boom, Chinese couples had larger disposable incomes and were increasingly opting for big, lavish weddings. In the early 90s, there was even a trend among couples to compete to see how much money they could spend on their weddings. Newlywed couples would book over 50 tables for their wedding banquets, hire luxury cars to pick up the bride, buy expensive wedding gifts and go on honeymoons. Many couples in late 1990s were repulsed by the trend to fork out thousands on lavish weddings and instead opted for low-key ceremonies with a small group of people including family and friends.

Fan Zhaosheng, 35 married his wife Zhao Jianxiu, 35, in 1999. Fan said, "We did not want to have a big fat wedding. A simple wedding was more popular among young people."

According to Fan, they did not have any wedding ceremony or a banquet. Instead, after registering their marriage, they went to have dinner with 20 members of their family.

According to Chinese tradition, wedding guests should give the married couple a red envelope with money. The amount of money depends on how close the relationship is between the guest and the couple or how generous the guest is feeling at the time. In Beijing, 500 yuan was considered a decent gift.

(By Wei Ying)

Qiu Li and Liu Bin
Photo provided by Qiu Li

The 2000s

As people have become richer and richer, big weddings have become more and more popular. It is now the norm to invite up to 500 friends to join in the wedding celebrations, which could cost the couple and their families tens of thousands of yuan.

Qiu Li and Liu Bin married in January 22, this year. Their wedding was held at a popular hotel in the bride's hometown of Wuhan, in Hubei Province.

Qiu said her wedding was fantastic but tiring. Ten cars formed a motorcade and drove to the wedding hotel,

where the couple took their wedding oaths.

Nearly 500 guests attended the wedding ceremony, including both Qiu and Liu's bosses. The wedding lasted for three hours. The young couple also hired professional wedding marshals and a cameraman to document the event. Without eating anything, the couple went to each table to toast their guests and play wedding games.

The young couple and their parents spent over a month preparing for the wedding.

(By Han Manman)